

# SCIENTIST DECRIES MARS LIFE SEARCH

Says Hunt Could Give U.S.  
'Simple Simon' Reputation

By EVERT CLARK

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 12.—"In looking for life on Mars we could establish for ourselves the reputation of being the greatest Simple Simons of all time," a prominent scientific critic of the nation's space programs warned today.

The warning came from Dr. Philip H. Abelson in an editorial in Science. Dr. Abelson is the magazine's editor and is director of the Carnegie Institution's Geophysical Laboratory. He is a physicist with experience in the nuclear and biological fields.

Science is the journal of the influential, 90,000-member American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Dr. Abelson does not believe that life, particularly life resembling that on earth, will be found on Mars. He proposed "a few inexpensive experiments" on earth to save years, billions of dollars and the possibility of "considerable eventual disappointment" if the search for life on Mars should prove fruitless.

## Sees \$100 Billion Cost

Dr. Abelson has stimulated considerable debate among scientists and the public by criticizing the program to land men on the moon. He has called the program unscientific and an improper use of resources.

Asked today to expand on the views expressed in his Mars editorial, he said he did not object to exploration as such. But he opposed the "baloney" that the search for life on Mars was a major justification "for a program that is likely to cost as much as \$100 billion during the next two decades."

Attempts to sterilize spacecraft to prevent them from carrying earth organisms to Mars might add "many years and billions of dollars" to the cost, the editorial said.

It suggested, instead, careful selection of experiments to be sent to Mars and "relatively inexpensive studies here on earth" to determine whether sterilization was really necessary. It may not be necessary if the Martian atmosphere is really as cold, arid and lacking oxygen as current studies indicate, Dr. Abelson said.

He declared that his purpose in writing the editorial had been to give first-rank biologists not connected with the

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space program a chance to enter the debate over Mars.

But Dr. Abelson said he was losing heart in his role as gadfly.

"I think we should look at the problems, frontiers and opportunities here on earth," he said. "For my personal taste, there are more important things to do here."

"But I am learning how strong the human interest in exploration is," he went on. "I had it brought home the other day by learning how many millions of people subscribe to The National Geographic Magazine."

"There is no other area of amateur interest in the interrelationship with science that is so strong," Dr. Abelson said. "People just want to know what's on the mountain top."

Dr. Abelson said he had "even stopped fighting the moon, really." If the public wants the moon to be explored, even though the "scientific concern is not commensurate with the dollars involved," he now says: "O.K., O.K."

Although he opposes such expensive national programs, he said, he will go along with them "provided that the public realizes they are chiefly for fun and adventure and not because some great contribution is being made to science."

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ABELSON

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